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ABSTRACT

A study investigated the experiences and perceptions of incoming, current, and former students with disabilities regarding access to and participation in postsecondary programs, educational supports available and effective for students with disabilities, and how well postsecondary experiences prepare students with disabilities for employment. Ten focus groups of students with physical, sensory, cognitive, emotional, and learning disabilities participated in the study. Students came from different universities and from ethnic backgrounds that included African American, Native American, Native Alaskan, Pacific Islander, and Native Hawaiian. Findings indicate: (1) disability support providers are committed and supportive; (2) students long for a partnership between disability services on campus, university administration, and the students themselves; (3) disability policy at postsecondary institutions does not reflect practice, and students still need to fight for basic accommodations; (4) students feel their lives are micromanaged by support services; (5) peers often question the accommodations given to students with disabilities; (6) students with disabilities are reluctant to self-disclose to faculty; (7) family plays an important and supportive role for students with disabilities, even though family can also be over protective; and (8) computers are important learning tools for students with disabilities. (Contains 27 references.) (CR)

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Postsecondary Education and Employment for Students with Disabilities

Focus Group Discussions on Supports and Barriers in Lifelong Learning

Sponsored by
The Presidential Task Force on Employment of Adults with Disabilities
U.S. Department of Labor

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NIDRR

National Center for the Study of Postsecondary Educational Supports
A Rehabilitation Research and Training Center (RRTC)
University of Hawai'i

EC 308478

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

> ***In my senior year, I thought I didn't want to go to college, because some people in my high school told me that I might not be able to do it. So I stayed home for a year, and by the middle of February I was bored to death. So I called my rehab counselor and I talked with him while my mom was at work. In March, I went to rehab evaluation, and they said I probably couldn't do it. And the rest is history.***

This student almost gave up on the idea of going to college because of the limiting perceptions that others had about his severe physical disability. Fortunately, he was determined not to let those expectations limit his desire to participate in the college experience. He is now at a four-year university expecting to graduate in two years, with a rich network of friends and peers.

This experience is one of many told by students and graduates with disabilities who participated in a national focus group study conducted at ten sites nationwide. The study was designed to explore the student-consumer perspectives, regarding the nature and availability of educational supports and services, and the transition to subsequent employment. Focus group discussions centered on postsecondary supports and services, accommodations and barriers, relations with peers and faculty, and the preparation for the workforce.

There is a clear need to investigate the relationships between access and participation in postsecondary education programs and the quality of subsequent employment outcomes for people with disabilities. Employment rates for people with disabilities are closely linked to their level of education (Stodden & Dowrick, 1999), but they have a lower rate of postsecondary enrollment relative to the general population (OSEP, 1992).

This study was conducted by the National Center for the Study of Postsecondary Education Supports, a Rehabilitation Research and Training Center (RRTC), based at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa. The study was supported by the National Institute of Disability Rehabilitation and Research (NIDRR) and the Presidential Taskforce on the Employment of Adults with Disabilities.

Research Questions

- What are the experiences and perceptions of incoming, current, and former students with disabilities regarding access to and participation in postsecondary programs?

- What educational supports are available and effective for students with disabilities?

- How well do their postsecondary experiences prepare students with disabilities for employment, and what are their perspectives concerning transition to the workplace?

Research Methodology

Focus groups were selected for this study as a method ideally suited to elicit the student-consumer perspectives, because the group discussion format generally yields information that is richer, more complete, and more revealing than individual interviews, surveys, or questionnaires (Brodigan, 1992). Focus groups allow the members of the target population to express their ideas in a spontaneous matter that is not structured according to the researcher's prejudices (Bertrand, Brown & Ward, 1992). Focus groups provide more in-depth insights into how the target population feels on specific issues, and offer a security and comfort that encourage candid responses (Vaughm, Schumm, & Sinagub, (1996). In a relaxed group setting where participants sense that their opinions and experiences are valued, participants are more likely to express their opinions and perceptions openly (Byers & Wilcox, 1988).

Data Collection and Analysis

The ten sites were selected to maximize diversity of types of disability, geography, and ethnicity. Researchers at each site used purposive sampling to select information rich participants for the focus groups that would have both depth and breadth of experience as well as sharing common experiences (Krueger, 1998; Morgan, 1988). Most sites developed a unique secondary focus for their groups, and selected participants based on the relevant criteria, such as type of disability or ethnicity. Each site coordinator invited students and graduates through personal and institutional connections that would both meet the selection criteria and had good potential for contributing to the group discussion. The resulting focus groups were composed of students with physical, sensory, cognitive, emotional and learning disabilities, with ethnic backgrounds that included African American, Native American, Native Alaskan, Pacific Islander, and Native Hawaiian.

Focus group questions were developed at each site and reviewed by local informants to ensure their relevance and appropriateness. The University of Hawai'i held the first focus group as a pilot and distributed its list of questions as a template, with each site adapting them to fit their secondary focus.

Audio or videotapes of focus group discussions were transcribed and analyzed by the research team at the University of Hawai'i. First, researchers identified a list of the key issues that were discussed in each group. The resulting list of approximately 10-20 main issues from each site were then compared across the groups to identify both issues common across the sites and those unique to a certain group. Supercategories organized the findings, separating postsecondary supports and barriers into categories: people (individual and peer), faculty, administrative, and employment. Preliminary findings from this study were presented for further peer review at the March 2000 National Review Forum in Honolulu.

Findings at a Glance

- **Importance of student disability services:** Disability support providers are committed and supportive, sometimes offering guidance beyond their job descriptions.

- **Coordination of support services:** Students long for a "partnership" between disability services on campus, university administration, and the students themselves. Medical and disability support service personnel must agree on a "common language" for students to receive appropriate accommodations.

- **Institutional concerns:** Disability policy at postsecondary institutions does not reflect practice, and students still need to fight for basic accommodations. The administrative process for implementing policy is generally unwieldy and time-consuming.

- **Student-centered needs:** Students feel their lives are "micromanaged" by support services, rather than having service providers focus on individual needs. Student needs must be determined by the students themselves.

- **Accommodations stigma:** Non-disabled peers often question the accommodations given to students with disabilities, especially for those with learning or other hidden disabilities. These accommodations are often seen as "unfair advantages."

- **Self disclosure:** Students with disabilities are reluctant to self-disclose to faculty, because they have experienced faculty unwilling or unable to accommodate their needs. Once students self-disclose, faculty must maintain their privacy.

- **Faculty ignorance:** Postsecondary faculty are often unaware of disability issues and are not well educated about the needs and rights of students with disabilities.

- **Faculty teaching styles:** Faculty also must learn different teaching styles to accommodate specific disabilities, such as blindness, hearing impairment or a learning disability.

- **Faculty mentoring:** Faculty mentoring offers a valuable resource for students with disabilities to succeed in the postsecondary environment.

- **Ethnicity:** Some students with disabilities from an ethnic minority feel that peers and faculty with the same ethnic background can offer uniquely effective support and guidance in the postsecondary environment, and can help to prepare them to confront potential discrimination issues in the workplace.

- **Peer socialization:** Peers can provide guidance by example and be a resource for information about services and supports available for students with disabilities. Peers are an important link to integrate students with disabilities into the campus community.

- **Role of family:** Family plays an important and supportive role for students with disabilities. However, family can also be overprotective, sometimes discouraging youth with disabilities from going on to postsecondary education.

- **Assistive technology:** Computers are important learning tools for students with disabilities, especially those with learning or mental disabilities or blindness. Lack of access to assistive technology is perceived as a political problem rather than a logistic one.

- **Preparation for employment:** There is a general sense that postsecondary education does not directly prepare students for specific occupations, but that it increases self-confidence and marketability which are important assets in the workplace. Students see a conflict between the expectation that a college education will prepare them for employment, and general assumptions that people with disabilities are unemployable.

- **Transition to employment:** Students fear the transition to employment because they expect workplace discrimination. They expect to be denied special accommodations, and thus, prepare to self-advocate more aggressively.

Background

Postsecondary education provides individuals with the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and the skills that are becoming increasingly important to obtaining quality employment in American society. For people with disabilities, access to postsecondary education is particularly important. It has been clearly established that there are statistically significant relationships between disability, level of education, and employment outcomes (Benz, Doren, & Yovanoff, 1998; Blackorby & Wagner, 1996). Employment rates for people with disabilities have a stronger positive correlation with educational level than for the general population. Unfortunately, the postsecondary enrollment levels for people with disabilities, while improving, remain low in comparison to the general population (Stodden & Dowrick, 2000; OSEP, 1992), even with the existing legally mandated support services. There is currently insufficient information on the availability and effectiveness of these supports. It is necessary to explore how well they offer people with disabilities increased access and participation in postsecondary education programs, as well as examine the remaining barriers. There is also a need to explore students' transition into the workforce, the supports and barriers they encountered (or expected) there, and how postsecondary education affects the quality of subsequent employment.

The Center on Disability Studies at the University of Hawai'i has developed a national Rehabilitation Research and Training Center (RRTC) for the Study of Postsecondary Educational Supports to address these issues. One of the center's primary research methodologies incorporates the viewpoints of students and graduates, because these consumer perspectives are an integral part of the study of educational supports. In addition, the center involves student-consumers in the planning, development and implementation of research activities, a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach that can increase the relevance of research findings and empower participants to use this knowledge to enhance their own lives (Whyte, 1991). This study was supported by the National Institute of Disability Rehabilitation and Research (NIDRR) and the Presidential Taskforce on the Employment of Adults with Disabilities.

Focus Group Research

OVERVIEW

Focus group research is a qualitative methodology that is generally used to gain a more complete understanding of such issues as motivation, behavior, feelings, or decision-making strategies (Krueger, 1988; Morgan, 1988). Focus groups are formed to discuss issues relevant to a specific topic. Most focus groups will have between five and fifteen participants and will last about one or two hours, for the discussion itself. They require careful planning and a facilitator who is both skilled and well prepared.

GENERAL ADVANTAGES

Focus groups are designed to reveal multiple perspectives and are best suited to address questions that inform or assess policy and practice (Brotherson & Goldstein, 1992). The information produced in a group discussion format will be richer, more complete, and more revealing than that which can be obtained in individual interviews, surveys, or questionnaires (Brodigan, 1992). Participants can express their ideas in a spontaneous matter that is not structured according to the researcher's prejudices and expectations (Bertrand, Brown & Ward, 1992), and they often feel more secure discussing sensitive topics, helping to encourage more candid expression of their opinions and perceptions (Byers & Wilcox, 1988). Finally, focus group results can be readily interpreted, as the data is in a narrative form. However, focus group results cannot be statistically generalized to a larger population, due to the small number of participants and the need to use purposive sampling methods (Morgan, 1998).

FOCUS GROUPS IN EDUCATION RESEARCH

The use of focus group methodology is increasing in the area of education research, where focus groups have been used to assess and improve the quality and effectiveness of college programs, to examine perceptions of adult students regarding community college programs and services, to identify critical support services and programs for postsecondary students with learning disabilities, and in numerous colleges to assess the compliance of disability education efforts with the Americans with Disabilities Act (Brodigan, 1992; Bers & Smith, 1987; Armstrong et al., 1996; Finn, 1997).

Study Methodology

SITE SELECTION

This study was conceived and planned by disability researchers, consumers and professionals at the National Center for the Study of Postsecondary Supports at the University of Hawai'i Center on Disability Studies. Researchers at the center coordinated all project activities, analyzed the data, and prepared this report. A pilot focus group was held in Hawai`i, which served as the model for the other groups in this study.

Since it is essential to explore the needs, perceptions and experiences of a broad range of students with disabilities, researchers selected ten sites nationwide that would include students who live in diverse communities, represent various disabilities, and come from different ethnic backgrounds. This use of multiple focus groups enhances the potential for transferability of the study's findings.

A grid of possible sites was created to structure these three main variables, starting with the four RRTC consortium members and a list that included a number of postsecondary institutions where there were potential collaborators. The selected sites were contacted, several agreed to participate in the study, and then additional sites were contacted, so as to maximize the study's diversity, until a total of ten sites joined the project. The sites selected to participate from the first round of contacts were the University of Hawai'i, Virginia Commonwealth University, the University of Massachusetts, the University of Minnesota, Ohio State University, and Oregon Health Sciences University. Sites added in the next round were the University of Montana, the University of Alaska, California State University at Chico, and the University of Arizona. Oregon Health Sciences University subsequently dropped out of the study, so the University of Kentucky was contacted and agreed to participate. These sites represented a mix of large city, small city, and rural locations, in different geographic regions of the US (as good as could be obtained within pragmatic constraints).

Each of the ten sites participating in this study, together with the research coordinators at the University of Hawai'i, developed a unique secondary focus for its group. This meant that participants at each site were selected based on different criteria: disability type, ethnicity, and major field of studies. Several of the sites put together focus groups with participants representing a mix of these criteria, like the group at California State University which examined rural issues (See Appendix 3). At each site, the coordinator invited a number of students (and graduates) through professional connections and the institution's network of disability services. Participants were identified who would both meet the selection criteria and had good potential for contributing to the group discussion. The resulting focus groups were composed of students with physical, sensory, cognitive, emotional and learning disabilities, and with ethnic backgrounds that included African American, Native American, Native Alaskan, Pacific Islander, and Native Hawaiian (See Appendix 1).

SELECTION CRITERIA FOR FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

This study used purposive sampling, the most frequently used sampling procedure in focus group research, in which participants are selected based on specific criteria that are relevant to the research questions. The goal of purposive sampling is to identify information rich participants with both a depth and a breadth of experience who share certain commonalties (Patton, 1990; Morgan, 1988). Because focus group discussions are one-time events, participants must share a common ground in order to establish rapport readily. These unifying elements create a setting out of which a discussion can emerge where participants challenge, confirm, or expand each other's views though interaction (Krueger 1988).

FOCUS GROUP PROCEDURES

To ensure that the group will have a focus, it is important to prepare questions that will provide structure to the discussion—while it is also important for the moderator to use them as a guide rather than as a template. The initial list of questions for this study was developed for the pilot focus group in Hawai'i by researchers at the center in collaboration with consumers and professionals, using a PAR approach. This technique helps to ensure that the results will be a valid reflection of what the participants were trying to express in their discussion, thereby enhancing the study's credibility. The questions were crafted to explore the supports and barriers to postsecondary education and employment, both for people with disabilities in general and, more specifically, for the group's secondary focus on blindness.

This list of questions from the pilot group was used as a model for the other sites, but it was restructured for each group to be more relevant to its secondary focus, as well as to include all participants in the design of the study. Researchers at each site developed their own list of questions, in collaboration with the research coordinators at the center, potential participants, local disability service providers, consumers and other interested parties (e.g., family members). Rather than using the same list of questions at each site to standardize this procedure, the process of redesigning the questions helped to ensure that they would stimulate informative and topical discussions, that any inappropriate questions would be removed, and participants would have more ownership and involvement with the study.

Each focus group lasted for about one to two hours, with five to ten participants[1] meeting together in a private, comfortable location. Each group was led by a facilitator, sometimes along with a co-facilitator, who were selected on the basis of their background and experience. They were appropriate for the group, had the necessary skills to listen carefully, interpret responses and seek clarification on areas of ambiguity, and could guide the discussion with the list of questions. Most of the focus groups were videotaped for subsequent analysis, but several groups were audiotaped—when any participant did not want to be videotaped—and notes were written to cover any relevant nonverbal information. Participants were reminded at the beginning of the group that they could be excused at their request and removed from the study. One participant left at the beginning of a group for personal reasons.

After each group was conducted, the tapes and any notes of the discussion were reviewed by the site researchers, who then sent them to the University of Hawai'i center; the tapes of each focus group were transcribed at either the site or the center for analysis.

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

There are three important guidelines for qualitative research that govern the value and usefulness of this study: credibility, dependability, and transferability (Guba, 1981).

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[1] Except for two sites: the University of Arizona had nineteen participants; the University of Alaska had only three participants, due to cancellations.

Credibility, in the context of this study, refers to the congruence between the intended meanings of the participants and those meanings interpreted and represented by the researchers. This study's credibility was increased by having multiple researchers (Brotherson & Goldstein, 1992), at least one at each site and several at the UH center, and by including participants in the initial phase of analysis.

Dependability involves maintaining stability and consistency while allowing for an emergent study design. This project enhanced dependability through multiple researcher verification, recording and transcribing the focus group discussions, and maintaining a careful audit trail of the analysis process (Guba, 1991).

Transferability refers to the generalizability of the results, whether they will be applicable to another situation. Having multiple focus groups in diverse communities and using purposive sampling methods increased this study's potential transferability (Brotherson and Goldstein 1992).

DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURES

The procedures for analyzing the discussions were developed by the researchers at the UH center for the pilot focus group and were refined throughout the study. *The Focus Group Kit* by Krueger and Morgan (1998) informed the development of analysis procedures. To help coordinate the efforts of the ten sites and to disseminate project information, researchers posted a webpage which was regularly updated that included the general procedures, the model list of questions, site descriptions and site contact person. In addition, the UH researchers communicated regularly with each site by telephone and e-mail to coordinate this national study.

For the first level of analysis, researchers at the center carefully viewed or listened to the tape(s) from each site and a transcript was made of the discussion, except when the site provided one, along with notes on any pertinent nonverbal information[2]. The transcription, along with any supplementary notes or summary documents prepared by the site, was then used to develop a list of the main issues relevant to this study for each group. Two center researchers analyzed each transcript independently, using a coding scheme developed based on the content of the discussion and the purposes of this study, and they each produced a list of main issues from the transcript and any other notes. Then, the researchers met to compare results and work together to generate the final list of issues for each site. There were about ten to twenty key issues at most of the sites.

To organize the main issues across the groups, the UH team constructed four general supercategories, based on the findings and techniques suggested by Krueger (1998) and Bertrand, Brown, & Ward (1992). These supercategories cluster the results into the types of supports and barriers that were discussed in the focus groups: people, including self and peer; faculty; administrative; and employment. A chart was made for each group, with the issues placed into the appropriate supercategory. Some issues cut across the cat-

[2] Due to confidentiality issues, the University of Arizona discussion was summarized at the site. Center researchers used this summary in place of a transcription.

egories and were repeated across the chart. Appendices 2-11 list the main issues and supercategories for each site. Next, researchers merged these supercategory tables from each site, revealing issues which were discussed across the groups, as well as those more specific to a certain group.

These findings were presented at the National Review Forum to disseminate the findings to a group of disability researchers, professionals, and consumers who provided feedback and thereby contributed to the analysis process.

Findings

There were many issues of importance to students with disabilities discussed in the course of these ten national focus groups. Some of these issues recurred in group after group, lending them credibility and significance. One of the most common findings was that most of the participants said that they still must struggle to get very basic accommodations from postsecondary institutions and faculty even when the need is apparent, such as scheduling classes in buildings accessible to wheelchair users or providing ready access to alternate forms of text for students who are blind. An even more fundamental barrier mentioned in nearly all the groups was the powerful impact of negative attitudes and low expectations of people with disabilities. Other significant issues were specific to a group, as shown by the focus group of students with traumatic brain injury, a life-long condition that affects cognitive functions (See Appendix 6). These students reported that it was difficult to come to terms with this acquired disability and to reassess their abilities and limitations in the context of postsecondary education. The following is a list of findings accompanied by direct quotes from discussions.

IMPORTANCE OF STUDENT DISABILITY SERVICES (DSS)

> *"There is no time to do anything but put out fires, mainly with new students that are coming in and don't know what to do and where to go. So if you know anything at all, you're out there on your own."*

Disability support providers often give students a human connection to the services offered by the school. Particularly effective support providers offered guidance beyond their job description, such as giving advice about helpful faculty members or just being there for the students to voice their experiences, concerns, and dreams. At some schools the DSS is understaffed and can only assist students with the most urgent needs. Some students were unaware of the services available, and said that DSS should provide more outreach and information to students.

COORDINATION OF SUPPORT SERVICES

Students long for a "partnership" between disability services on campus, university administration, and the students themselves. Access barriers caused by construction and repairs could be minimized with better coordination. Faculty could be informed in advance of supports needed by an enrolled student. Medical and disability support service personnel must communicate with a "common language" when describing or categorizing disability needs, so that students receive appropriate accommodations in a timely fashion.

INSTITUTIONAL CONCERNS

Disability policy at postsecondary institutions does not reflect practice, and students still need to fight for basic accommodations. The administrative process for implementing policy is generally unwieldy and time-consuming. Students feel the need to organize so that their concerns will be addressed.

STUDENT-CENTERED NEEDS

> *"I really don't want anybody to pacify me: I'm normal, there's nothing wrong with me, it's just that I have a disability."*

Students feel their lives are "micromanaged" by support services, rather than having service providers focus on individual needs. Student needs must be determined by the students themselves, rather than administrators. Students want to be treated as individuals, not according to their disability. Many students mentioned the need for internal motivation to successfully participate in postsecondary education.

STIGMA OF ACCOMMODATIONS

> *"Teachers and other students think I'm getting away with something when I'm given accommodations."*

Non-disabled peers often question the accommodations given to students with disabilities, especially for those with learning and other hidden disabilities. Some other students see these accommodations as "unfair advantages" and believe that disability is used as an excuse.

SELF DISCLOSURE CONCERNS

"I'll be honest with you, if you've got a hidden disability, you might not want to be identified with us—if you want a job, or certain things, it's better to keep it hidden."

Students with disabilities are reluctant to self-disclose to faculty, because they have experienced faculty unwilling or unable to accommodate their needs. They may prefer to self-disclose using form letters from DSS offices stating the nature and implications of their disability. Once a student self-discloses, the faculty must maintain privacy and not disclose the student's disability to the rest of the class. Students fear that such disclosure would increase peer perception of unfair advantages, and students with a mental illness also fear the additional stigma often associated with this disability.

FACULTY IGNORANCE

"I had a professor who once went, 'We have to accommodate certain people in here,' being sarcastic, but I know that he was talking about me."

Postsecondary faculty are often unaware of disability issues and are not well educated about the needs and rights of students with disabilities. This is especially true for learning and other hidden disabilities. Faculty must trust students when they disclose their disability and not assume that they are "faking" their needs. The misconception that "disability equals inability" needs to be overcome.

FACULTY TEACHING STYLES

Faculty must learn different teaching styles to accommodate specific disabilities, such as using a more verbal approach for a student who is blind, or writing key topics on the board for a student with a learning disability. This would help all students, not just those with a disability.

FACULTY MENTORING

"What employers want and expect is somewhat different from what educators want and expect. Maybe we can provide for some sort of connectedness between employment and education."

Faculty mentoring offers a valuable resource for students with disabilities to succeed in the postsecondary environment. For some students, faculty mentoring is an equal-

ly important component of postsecondary education as the academic learning. A faculty mentor can also provide connections to assist the student with job placement.

ETHNICITY

Some students with disabilities from an ethnic minority feel that peers and faculty with the same ethnic background can offer uniquely effective support and guidance in the postsecondary environment and can help to prepare them to confront potential discrimination issues in the workplace. Issues relating to a student's ethnic minority often seemed more important than those related to having a disability.

PEER SOCIALIZATION

> *"Other people see my abilities better than I do...we are thinking the negative, we're putting ourselves down all the time... and then somebody comes up and says, 'Yeah, you're doing good.'"*

Peers can enable and provide guidance by example. They often serve as a resource for information about services and supports available for students with disabilities, as well as their right to such services and accommodations. Peers are an important part of helping students with disabilities become integrated into the campus community, many of whom said that the disability made it more difficult to meet people and make friends.

ROLE OF FAMILY

> *"I did fine in school,... but getting out I came back here because this is where my family lived; that wasn't really a choice for me."*

Family plays an important and supportive role for students with disabilities. However, family can also be overprotective, sometimes discouraging youth with disabilities from going on to postsecondary education. The need for family supports can limit some people with disabilities from leaving the area to pursue postsecondary education and career goals.

ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

> *"The word processor was an amazing tool that really kept me going, typing and typing for days."*

Computers are important learning tools for students with disabilities, especially a learning or mental disability, or blindness. Lack of access to assistive technology is per-

ceived as a political problem rather than a logistic one: students feel that there is administrative unwillingness to fund assistive technology they are legally entitled to, which could be resolved by increased cooperation between administration and students. The students repeatedly asked for more education and training in computer and related technology to be better prepared for postschool employment.

PREPARATION FOR EMPLOYMENT

> *"The only problem that I can see, when it comes to the initial hiring, we're going to have to tell them, 'I was hit by a truck and was unconscious for 4 months, and my brain was operated on—and by the way, here are my grades from college.'"*

There is a general sense that postsecondary education does not directly prepare students for specific occupations, but that it does increase self-confidence and marketability ("selling yourself") which are important assets in the workplace. Students who succeed at postsecondary education still expect employers to question their qualifications based on their disabilities. They see a conflict between the expectation that a college education will prepare students for employment, and general assumptions that people with disabilities are unemployable.

TRANSITION TO EMPLOYMENT

Students fear the transition to employment because they expect workplace discrimination, and they do not feel that school is preparing them for the transition for employment. They expect to be denied special accommodations and thus prepare to self-advocate more aggressively. Working in family businesses is a good entry into employment ("gets your foot in the door") because family members do not hold discriminatory attitudes. Some students see telecommuting as a viable alternative to regular employment and thus want to become more computer literate. Internships and job training programs through the postsecondary institution need to be accessible, or alternatives provided.

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Appendix 1: Site Description

Site	Secondary Focus	Participant Ethnicity	School Size
University of Hawai'i	**Blindness**	Hawaiian, Filipino, Caucasian	4-year university
University of Massachusetts[1]	**Traumatic Brain Injuries (TBI)**	Caucasian, Mixed	2-year community college
University of Minnesota[1]	**Ethnicity: Native American**	Native American	2-year community college
Virginia Commonwealth University[1]	**Ethnicity: African American**	African American, Caucasian	4-year university
Ohio State University	**Psychology Majors**	Caucasian, African American	4-year university
California State University - Chico	**Rural Issues**	Caucasian	4-year university
University of Montana	**Mental Disabilities**	Caucasian	4-year university
University of Alaska	**Ethnicity: Native Alaskan**	Native Alaskan, Caucasian	4-year university
University of Arizona	**Administrative Issues**	Mixed	4-year university
University of Kentucky	**Physical Disabilities**	Caucasian	4 year university

[1]The groups coordinated at these sites took place at other schools.

Appendix 2: Main Issues: University of Alaska at Anchorage

Secondary Focus on Ethnicity: Native Alaskan

People Support & Barriers (Self & Peer)	Faculty Supports & Barriers	Administrative Supports & Barriers	Employability (Pre- & Post-College)
2) peer connections are important, and some students have difficulty making friends	8) faculty should be aware that a student with a disability is in their class in advance	1) student disability services are supportive and helpful	10) more computer & technology education will better prepare students for the workforce
3) education teaches students important social skills	9) some faculty readily provide accommodations while others do not	4) computers are an essential AT for students with LD	
12) students with LD need to study more; accommodations do not always help.		5) students with disabilities use services provided for all students	
		6) VR must accommodate students who need to take fewer or less difficult classes	
		7) many students prefer to disclose with a letter from DSS	
		11) students with disabilities "have to work twice as hard" to get necessary accommodations	

1) Student disability service has been supportive and helpful. Services used included educational assessment, counseling, notetaking, taping texts and testing accommodations.

2) Connections with peers are an important part of the psed experience. Students with learning and mental disabilities need to work harder to meet people and make friends.

3) Postsecondary education teaches students with learning and mental disabilities how to communicate with and relate to others.

4) Computers are an essential technology for students with LD. They help students to organize their thoughts, focus, write better, and do research.

5) Students with disabilities use many of the support services provided for all students, like the writing assistance center.

6) VR services must accommodate the needs of students with LD and mental disabilities to take reduced course loads or less demanding classes.

7) Many students prefer to use standard disclosure forms to inform faculty about their disability. This lends institutional credibility and helps to maintain confidentiality.

8) Faculty should be informed that a student with a disability is enrolled in their class in advance to "be prepared and not be blasted with it on the first day of class."

9) Some faculty readily provide accommodations while others do not.

10) Students want more computer and technology education to prepare for the workforce

11) Students with disabilities have to work "twice as hard as everybody else," to get necessary accommodations

12) Students with LD need to study much more than other students to do well in school. Sometimes accommodations cannot change this.

Appendix 3: Main Issues: California State University at Chico

Secondary Focus on Rural Setting

People Support & Barriers (Self & Peer)	Faculty Supports & Barriers	Administrative Supports & Barriers	Employability (Pre- & Post-College)
13) "focus on the individual not on disability"	5) connect with faculty early to educate them about needs	15) campus construction can seriously impact mobility of students who are blind	2) education prepares for employment, but not how disability will affect future employment
1) defining goals is difficult with a disability that fluctuates in intensity	12) faculty mentoring can lead to employment	3) advisors are incapable & overworked, so rehab. plans are destined to fail; students must self-advocate	12) faculty mentoring can lead to employment
7) education prepares students to deal with disability, not just academics	8) faculty should treat students as competent, not as having disabilities	10) students still have to fight for services, 10 years after the ADA	7) education prepares students to deal with disability, not just academics
16) access will only come with attitude change	16) access will only come with attitude change	16) access will only come with attitude change	14) internships must offer accommodations or alternatives
9) filing grievances gets you labeled as a 'hot head' and an 'upstart'		11) a rural setting increases the need for reliable, accessible transportation	6) employers in the disability field are better at accommodating needs

1) Defining goals is difficult with a disability that often fluctuates in intensity.

2) Education prepares for employment but not for the ways a disability might affect it. Students get thrown right into workplace to "sink or swim."

3) Rehabilitation counselors are incapable, overworked and shun responsibility, so rehab. plans are destined to fail and students must self-advocate more aggressively.

4) It is important to connect with instructors early on, to educate them about student needs.

5) Employers in the disability field (like Center for Independent Living) are better at accommodating needs and are less prejudiced.

6) Education prepares for dealing with disability, figuring out special needs. This is even more important than academics.

7) Being treated as a professional, as competent, rather than just as a 'disabled student' raises confidence.

8) Filing grievances gets you labeled as a "hot head" and an "upstart." This discourages students from asserting their rights.

9) Students still have to fight for services, 10 years after the ADA.

10) The rural setting increases the importance of good, reliable public transportation.

11) Faculty mentoring can lead to employment.

12) Treat the individual, not the disability.

13) Internships/job training programs must offer accommodations or alternative options.

14) Campus construction sites can seriously impact mobility of students who are blind.

15) Access will only come with a change in attitudes.

Appendix 4: Main Issues: University of Hawai'i

Secondary Focus on Blindness

People Support & Barriers (Self & Peer)	Faculty Supports & Barriers	Administrative Supports & Barriers	Employability (Pre- & Post-College)
1) "focus on individual not on disability"	16) need for more verbal teaching strategies to accommodate blindness	2) focus supports on individual needs without micromanaging	7) education does not specifically prepare for employment
4) peer expectations limit more than physical barriers	3) need to overcome misconception that disability = inability	3) need to overcome misconception that disability = inability	8) education increases self-confidence & marketability
5) peers enable by example and by giving information		13) student needs must be determined by students, not administrators	9) conflicting expectations: disability preventing employment vs. education preparing for employment
6) main benefit of education is social		14) need for a partnership between disability services, students, and university	
17) life stories are powerful, if experienced directly		10) assistive technology must be widely available	
		18) service counselors are committed & supportive	
		11) lack of access is mostly a political problem	

1) The focus should be on individuals, not the disability. Students don't want to be patronized.

2) Support services need to be supportive, and should not take control away from the person they are helping.

3) When helping students with disabilities, disability services should not use a deficiency perspective.

4) The greatest barriers for students who are blind are the effects of other people's expectations, more so than physical barriers.

5) A peer network of other students was an important source of information about supports and services available to students with disabilities

6) Social interaction and exposure were perceived to be primary benefits of college. Additional benefits included learning independence, metacognitive skills, and academic knowledge.

7) Post-secondary education did not specifically prepare college graduates for employment, in terms of obtaining a career related to their major field.

8) Career counseling was helpful to finding employment, by teaching students how to "sell themselves."

9) There may be a conflict between the expectation that a college graduate is employable versus the expectation that a person who is blind should not have a job.

10) Universities must provide equal access to technology for all students, but they have not done so. Assistive technology should be integrated, not segregated.

11) When assistive technologies are not available, it is because the funding has not been allocated.

12) Policy and practice are not equivalent. Students who are blind find that they often need to fight for the equal access that they are legally entitled to.

13) To conduct valid research on institutional practice, ask the people who are being served, not the administrators.

14) There needs to be a partnership between students with disabilities, disability services and the university.

15) High school did not adequately prepare students with disabilities for the college experience.

16) Teachers and administrators who are dealing with students who are blind should be highly verbal in their instructions.

17) Life stories can be powerful, but being there is important; mediating the experience can reduce the impact.

18) Students who are blind do not want to be treated as exceptional for having functional skills.

Appendix 5: Main Issues: University of Kentucky
Secondary Focus on Physical Disabilities

People Support & Barriers (Self & Peer)	Faculty Supports & Barriers	Administrative Supports & Barriers	Employability (Pre- & Post-College)
2) some peers feel that students with disabilities don't belong	2) some faculty feel that students with disabilities don't belong	5) large classes can be a barrier for some students; assistive technology can help	1) pursued education to improve employability
3) family & peers often discourage students from attending college; students need internal motivation	7) faculty aren't always willing to accommodate	8) universities aren't training faculty/ staff enough about disability rights	13) fear employers will discriminate & won't accommodate
11) other students sometimes feel accommodations are unfair advantages		9) students cannot rely on a uniform set of supports & services across institutions	
6) ADA has helped students self-advocate & request accommodations		14) students with physical disabilities found inaccessibility was main barrier	
12) many students with disabilities don't know their rights under ADA		18) policies aren't always implemented without a struggle	
10) some students first experienced prejudice in postsecondary setting		19) confidentiality is important, especially with hidden disabilities	
16) students with disabilities need to organize for support & power		18) university talks about creating a community, but it's not happening	
17) students with disabilities help each other with information & support		20) policies are not always implemented when process impedes practice	

1) Go to college to improve employability, leave rural communities, and to avoid traditional gender roles.
2) Some people at school had the attitude that students with disabilities don't belong and are cheating the system; this needs to change.
3) Students go to college often in the face of family and peer discouragement, telling them that they will not succeed. Internal motivation is crucial.
4) Families need to let children become independent and learn more about their abilities and limitations.
5) For some disabilities, like hearing and vision impairments, large classes are an expected barrier and impediment. Need for assistive technology.
6) Students should know & exercise their rights when faculty do not accommodate. ADA provides rights and accommodations, and has made students less dependent on decisions made by individual faculty.
7) Faculty not always willing to accommodate, even when dealing with an obvious physical disability that is clearly a barrier to the requirement.
8) Faculty sometimes feel that the students don't belong, and that they are cheating the system. There isn't enough faculty/staff training on disability rights and necessary supports.
9) Students experienced varied supports and services across institutions, and therefore cannot rely on a standard for access and accommodation.
10) Some students with disabilities first realized in college that others saw them as 'different.'
11) Other students sometimes feel that accommodations for students with disabilities are unfair advantages.
12) Many students with disabilities don't know their rights under the ADA, or how to self-advocate.
13) Students fear that future employers will discriminate and refuse to accommodate them.
14) Main barrier at school was getting around campus, not the academics. Construction often blocks access for wheelchairs. Qualified students and faculty have rejected the school due to access issues.
15) DSS office has been an important resource, but it's understaffed. "Their case load is 1 to 365."
16) Students with disabilities need to organize to support each other and to have more power. Many students are passive and avoid confrontation.
17) Students with disabilities help each other with information, support and advice.
18) The university talks about building a community, but the students don't see that happening.
19) Confidentiality is important, especially for those with hidden disabilities who don't always want to disclose.
20) There are many policies on the books, which aren't always implemented without a struggle. The process can interfere with practice.

Appendix 6: Main Issues: University of Massachusetts
Secondary Focus on Traumatic Brain Injuries

People Support & Barriers (Self & Peer)	Faculty Supports & Barriers	Administrative Supports & Barriers	Employability (Pre- & Post-College)
1) TBI forces students to self-evaluate own abilities & limitations	6) reluctance to self-disclose to faculty	2) fears that college wouldn't provide accommodations were dispelled	13) students expect workplace discrimination, and less support
3) concern re: how apparent disability is to peers	10) faculty should not only accommodate, but also be proactive	4) students found support services via counselors, family & flyers	14) working for family can get "foot in the door"
5) students struggle to acknowledge needing help		8) service counselor was committed & supportive	
7) peers often recognize abilities more than students themselves		12) service counselors should know supportive vs. inflexible faculty	
11) TBI is life-long condition that affects cognitive functioning			
15) family support is crucial in all stages			

1) Students with TBI need to find out their own abilities and limitations, especially cognitive functions important for learning.

2) Fears that college wouldn't provide accommodations were dispelled.

3) Students are concerned about how apparent their disability is to peers.

4) Students located support services through counselors, family connections, and flyers.

5) It is a struggle for students to acknowledge the need for accommodations and support.

6) Students are often reluctant to self-disclose to faculty.

7) Students feel that other students often recognize their abilities more than they do themselves.

8) Students all found the school's disability service counselor to be very helpful , committed & essential to support services.

9) Accommodations used include: voice recognition software, texts on tape, study partners, and taping lectures.

10) Students expect faculty to not only be accommodating, but also proactive when they notice the student having difficulties in class.

11) Students emphasized the need to come to terms with TBI, as a lifelong condition that affects cognitive functioning.

12) Students mentioned the usefulness of support service counselor's awareness of supportive as well as inflexible faculty.

13) Students expect to be discriminated against in the workplace and not to have the same level of supports, but they know that they must self-advocate and believe they will persevere.

14) Getting your foot in the door is the first step to starting a career. Working for a family business can help to accomplish this, because family will be less biased about abilities.

15) Family support is crucial in all stages of education and life.

Appendix 7: Main Issues: University of Minnesota
Secondary Focus on Ethnicity: Native Americans

People Support & Barriers (Self & Peer)	Faculty Supports & Barriers	Administrative Supports & Barriers	Employability (Pre- & Post-College)
2) family is an important source of support	9) faculty mentoring is an important support	1) student counselor has been supportive & helpful	9) faculty mentoring is an important support that can lead to employment opportunities
4) internal motivation & goals are important to postsecondary access and success		5) financial barriers can be overcome with aid & counseling	8) students are optimistic about postschool employment
6) cultural activities can be important supports			3) learning teamwork & networking are important to obtaining employment
7) peers in the student cohort support each other			

1) Student support provider has been very helpful, with "never an unanswered question."

2) Family is an important source of support.

3) Learning teamwork and networking are important to obtaining postschool employment.

4) Students felt that having internal motivation and long-range goals are important to postsecondary access and success.

5) Financial difficulties are often a barrier to pursuing postsecondary education. Financial aid and counseling are important.

6) For some students, spiritual and cultural activities are important supports.

7) The students in the cohort provide support for each other.

8) Students are optimistic about employment opportunities after graduation.

9) Faculty mentoring is an important form of support that can lead to employment opportunities.

Appendix 8: Main Issues: University of Montana

Secondary Focus on Mental Disabilities

People Support & Barriers (Self & Peer)	Faculty Supports & Barriers	Administrative Supports & Barriers	Employability (Pre- & Post-College)
5) self-disclosure of mental illness is difficult due to unpredictable reactions	5) self-disclosure of mental illness is difficult due to unpredictable reactions	1) perception that DSS is only for students with "obvious" disabilities	6) self-disclosure of mental illness to employers can have negative consequences
7) students with mental illness have difficulty concentrating & getting motivated	8) some faculty are willing to accommodate, while others are not	2) DSS is supportive & refers students to other services	11) postsecondary education doesn't prepare for a specific job, but it provides confidence
15) students with mental illness depend on family support	13) web-based classes would be useful for some students, but difficult for others	3) small schools offer more individual support, if not specific disability services	15) students with mental illness depend on family support. This limits mobility and employment options
10) peer connections are important, especially at a large school	14) faculty need to maintain students' privacy, offer support & accommodations	4) DSS should provide outreach & connect with students	
17) students want peers to treat them as individuals first	17) students want faculty to treat them as individuals first	9) ADA has helped students get support & accommodations	
12) family is integral part of decision to attend college		16) students must be included in determining own needs	

1) There is a perception that student disability service serves students with more "obvious" disabilities, such as physical or LD, not students with other disabilities.

2) Student disability service is supportive, and links students to other services on campus.

3) Small colleges don't always provide specific disability services, but they offer more individualized support for students.

4) Ideally, student disability service should provide good outreach and information, maintain relationships with students, and have connections to related services.

5) Self-disclosure is particularly difficult for students with mental illness, because they have experienced a range of reactions to disclosure.

6) Self-disclosure to employers can have negative consequences, and employers may no longer trust their abilities.

7) Specific aspects of living with a mental illness include the inability to concentrate; unconstructive thoughts; and difficulty getting motivated, being punctual and meeting deadlines.

8) Some faculty are willing to accommodate, and others are not. To get accommodated, it is important to negotiate with faculty.

9) The situation for students with disabilities is improving since the ADA. Before, students often had to find their own supports and accommodations.

10) Peer connections are an important part of education, particularly on a large campus where students can feel isolated. It is important to share experiences with peers.

11) Postsecondary education does not specifically prepare you for the workforce, but it does give confidence.

12) Family background is an important factor in decision to attend college/university.

13) Web-based classes are useful for some students with a mental illness, like those who fear crowds; they are difficult for others in terms of motivation and isolation.

14) Faculty should maintain privacy of students who self-disclose, be prepared to provide extra support & accommodations.

15) Students with mental illness often depend on family support, and don't always have the option of moving away from home. This can limit their employment options.

16) It is important for disability support providers to listen to and involve students in determining needs and accommodations.

17) Students want to be treated as individuals, not according to their disability.

Appendix 9: Main Issues: Ohio State University

Secondary Focus on Psychology Majors

People Support & Barriers (Self & Peer)	Faculty Supports & Barriers	Administrative Supports & Barriers	Employability (Pre- & Post-College)
13) students should take responsibility for own needs	1) faculty unaware of support services & disability issues	6) medical & support providers must coordinate	10) students want more computer skills, for telecommuting
	5) need to overcome misconception that disability = inability	9) students found better services at smaller schools	
	2) some faculty do more than expected to understand & accommodate, while others are uncooperative	11) accommodations can become enforced self-disclosure	
	3) need to educate faculty on the rights of students with hidden disabilities		
4) some peers think accommodations are unfair advantages	4) some faculty think accommodations are unfair advantages		
	12) faculty need to maintain privacy		
	7) some students prefer to self-disclose to faculty using form letter		
	8) faculty must trust students' needs, not assume they are faking them		

1) Faculty are largely unaware of student support services and disability issues. Faculty often are reluctant to share their lecture notes.

2) Some faculty do more than is expected by learning about disabilities, providing unsolicited & innovative accommodations.

3) Students with "hidden disabilities" feel they do not get the same accommodations and understanding from faculty.

4) Faculty and peers think that accommodations for students are unfair advantages, or that they are using their disability as an excuse.

5) Some faculty believe disability indicates low IQ.

6) Student support services and diagnosing physicians need to communicate more effectively for students to receive necessary accommodations.

7) Sometimes it helps students to have a letter explaining their situation to faculty, but sometimes they prefer to explain in person.

8) Faculty must trust students and believe that they are not faking their needs.

9) Students have experienced better support services at small schools than at large schools.

10) Some students would like to become more computer literate so that they might be able to work from home.

11) Sometimes accommodations become enforced disclosures.

12) Faculty need to respect student confidentiality.

13) Students should take responsibility for their own needs and accommodations.

Appendix 10: Main Issues: Virginia Commonwealth University

Secondary Focus on Ethnicity: African Americans

People Support & Barriers (Self & Peer)	Faculty Supports & Barriers	Administrative Supports & Barriers	Employability (Pre- & Post-College)
4) need to overcome misconception that disability = ability	4) need to overcome misconception that disability = ability	1) students are asking for very basic accommodations	2) faculty mentoring & connections help students find employment
10) importance of self-advocacy & legal knowledge	2) faculty mentoring & connections just as important as academics	7) students are not always aware of assistive technologies available on campus	3) African American peers & faculty prepare students for racial issues in the workforce
11) peers tend to be more understanding than faculty	5) need to educate faculty about rights of people with hidden disabilities to accommodation	13) assistive technology must be widely available	15) students fear workplace discrimination, will need to self-advocate more
	12) faculty and administrators must trust students	12) faculty and administrators must trust students	
14) belief that partial disability does not merit full accommodation	14) belief that partial disability does not merit full accommodation	14) belief that partial disability does not merit full accommodation	14) belief that partial disability does not merit full accommodation
8) "focus on the individual not on the disability"	8) "focus on the individual not on the disability"		
	6) reluctance to self-disclose to faculty		
	9) faculty are responsible to accommodate & maintain privacy		

1) Students ask for very basic accommodations: working elevators, readers and books on tape and scheduling classes on ground floor.

2) Faculty mentoring and connections are just as important as academics, and can help students secure postschool employment.

3) School provides an important community of peer and faculty support for African Americans, which will help prepare them for employment.

4) Students are challenging faculty perceptions that people with disabilities are unable to be successful in college.

5) Faculty needs to be educated about disabilities, especially 'hidden disabilities' like LD and dyslexia, and the need for accommodations.

6) Students are reluctant to self-disclose their disabilities to faculty.

7) Students are not always aware of assistive technologies available on campus.

8) Students do not want to be patronized and seen as abnormal.

9) Once students self-disclose, faculty is responsible to accommodate and maintain privacy.

10) Importance of self-advocacy and knowing the law when the university fails to accommodate.

11) Peers tend to be more understanding and patient than faculty.

12) Faculty and administrators must trust students and believe that they are not faking their needs.

13) Assistive technology should be more widely available, not restricted to one location.

14) It is more difficult to get accommodations for a partial disability, because people do not believe you have the right to the same supports.

15) Students fear they will encounter a lack of awareness and supports in the workplace, so they expect to have to self-advocate more aggressively.

Appendix 11: Main Issues: University of Arizona

Secondary Focus on Administrative Issues

People Support & Barriers (Self & Peer)	Faculty Supports & Barriers	Administrative Supports & Barriers	Employability (Pre- & Post-College)
	4) students need more time to prepare for classes, and faculty should help	1) colleges must provide basic accommodations	
	2) ASL must be recognized as a foreign language	2) ASL must be recognized as a foreign language	
		3) university should provide interpreters for events	
		5) LD students have increased need for computer resources	

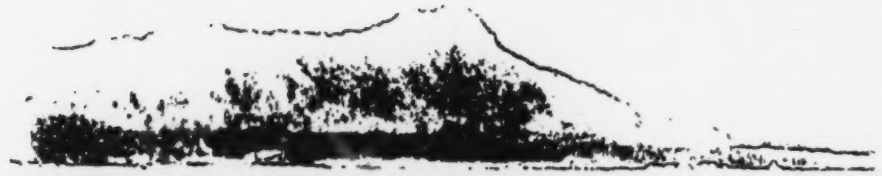
1) Colleges must provide basic accommodations: reachable elevator buttons, books on tape, braille texts, accessible ramps.

2) ASL must be recognized as a foreign language in the appropriate academic department.

3) Deaf students need more interpreters at university events and gatherings.

4) Students with disabilities (esp. blindness) need more time to prepare for classes and request instructors to release syllabi ahead of time.

5) LD students have additional needs for availability of computing resources.



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